

King County Budget: Achieving Sustainability Together

September 19 – October 24, 2011

Final Report

By

Chantal Stevens
Countywide Community Forums Program Manager

November 23, 2011



A King County public engagement program in the King County Auditor's Office





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Through objective and independent audits and services, we promote and improve performance, accountability, and transparency in King County government.

Auditor's Office Vision

Our work is of the highest quality and integrity resulting in significant improvements in accountability, performance, and efficiency in county government, and it promotes public trust.



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The King County Auditor's Office provides oversight of county government

through independent audits and other studies regarding the performance and efficiency of agencies and programs, compliance with mandates, and integrity of financial management systems. The office reports the results of each audit or study to the Metropolitan King County Council.

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 23, 2011

TO: Metropolitan King County Councilmembers

FROM: Cheryle A. Broom, ^{CB} County Auditor

SUBJECT: Countywide Community Forums Round 8 Report

Attached for your review is the report on the findings of the eighth round of Countywide Community Forums (CCF) as established under Ordinance 15896 on the *King County Budget: Achieving Sustainability Together*. The questions were meant to inform the 2012 budget process and to provide insight for Metro Transit (Metro) on the views of King County residents. Although the budget was passed early, it is worth mentioning that the priorities of the 1,440 residents who chose to participate in the CCF process appear to match those of the King County Council, selecting increased efficiency and productivity over more drastic cuts to address possible budget shortfall, agreeing that services or programs should be reduced or eliminated on a case-by-case basis based on the priorities set by the County Council and the King County Strategic Plan, and supporting the current course of action regarding the permanent budget reserve.

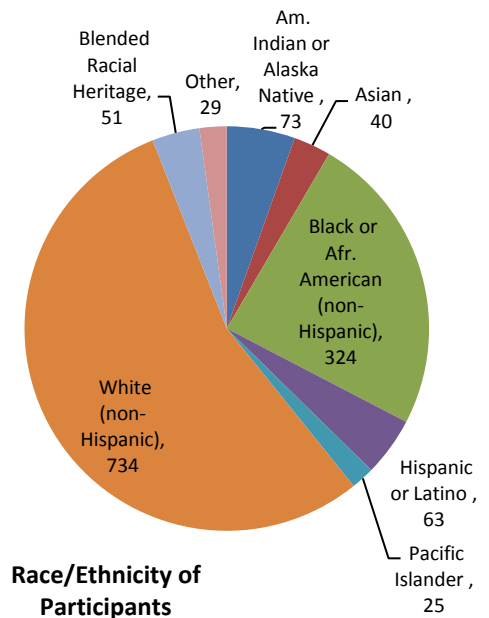
It is also worth noting that a large majority of respondents thought that Metro offers an essential service, but that 28% of respondents felt that public transportation is either less available or less convenient to them, even though Metro has thus far avoided any significant service reductions. Generally, respondents supported solutions that are already being implemented by Metro as part of their 9-Point Plan, although a slight plurality disagreed with the decision to eliminate Metro's ride free area in downtown Seattle.

For every round of forums, the independent coordinators have increased their outreach to different communities. For this round, they implemented an incentive program to encourage charitable organizations to engage their members and recognized the following organizations with grants ranging from \$1,250 to \$250: Compass Housing Alliance, Mary's Place, MLK FAME Community Center, Issaquah Food and Clothing Bank, Real Change, Valley Cities Counseling & Consultation, Woodland Park Zoo, Alliance of People with disAbilities, Brettler Family Place/Solid Ground, Multi-Service Center, and the White Center Community Development Association. As a result, the responses reflect the views of participants who don't often engage in the public process, such as homeless or formerly homeless men and women, low-income residents, and people with disabilities.

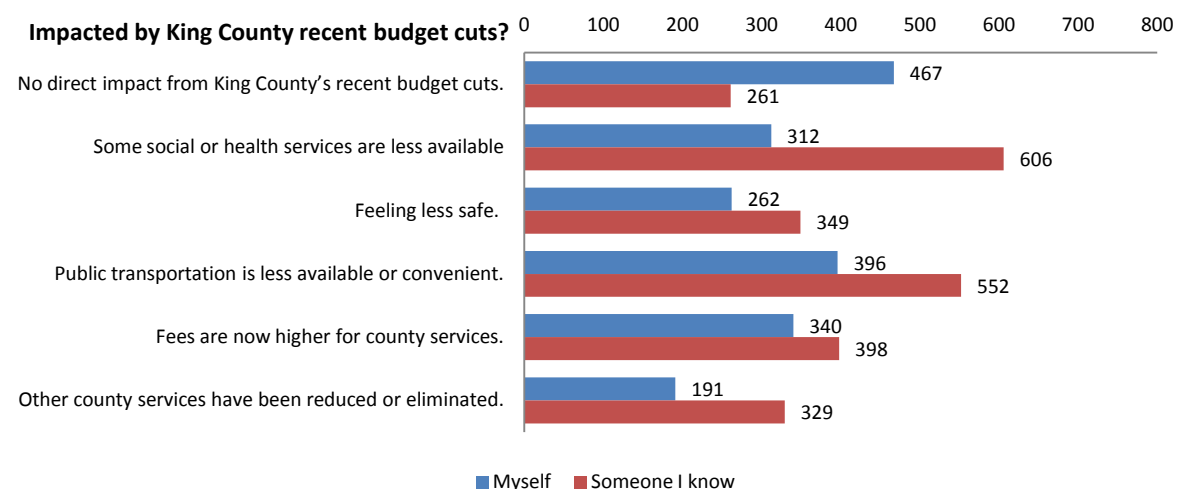
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Between September 19 and October 24, 2011, 1,440 King County residents completed a survey on the King County budget with a special emphasis on the Metro Transit budget. Large forums were held at Compass Housing, Mary's Place, Brettler Place, MLK FAME Community Center, University of Washington and Real Change, capturing the views of communities that are often underrepresented in civic life. About half of the surveys were taken on line.

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were female with just over half of the respondents in each of the following demographic categories: White (breakdown by race/ethnicity on the right), over 50, with 20 years or more of residence in King County, and having completed four or more years of college. Thirty-eight percent hailed from Seattle and 5% from unincorporated King County. King County Council Districts 2 and 4 had the strongest representation with 19 and 18%, followed by District 3, with 12%. Forty-three percent were satisfied to extremely satisfied with King County institutions, while 18% were unsatisfied to extremely unsatisfied (the rest were neutral or did not respond).

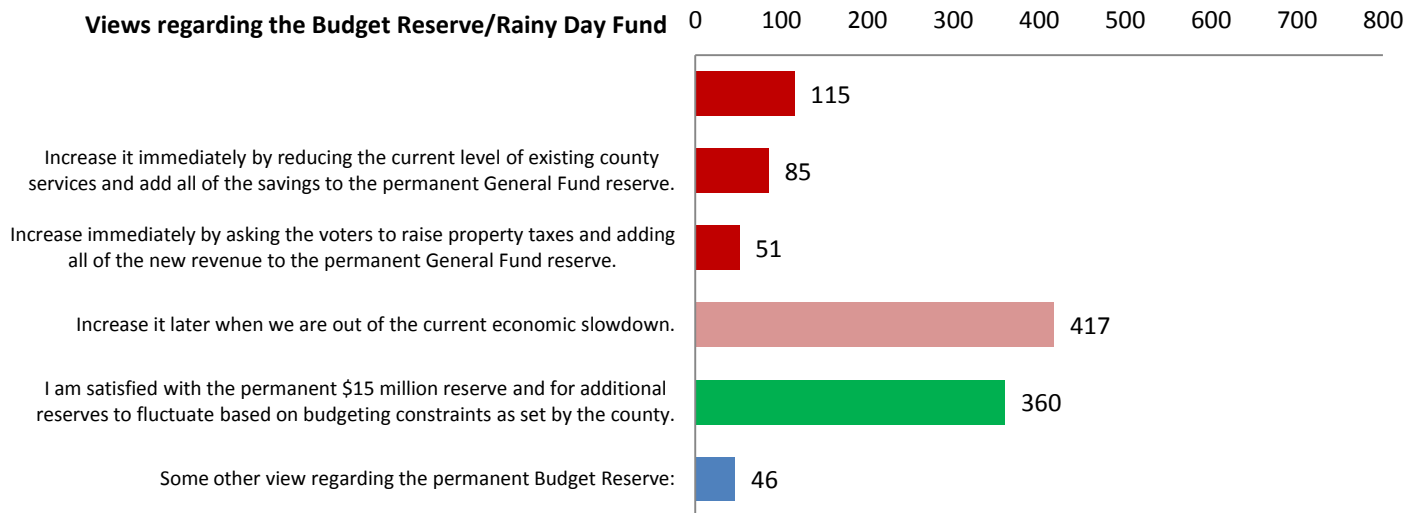


When asked whether any King County recent budget cut impacted them personally, a third of the respondents felt no direct impact (graph below). Of those who did, public transportation was identified as the highest impact, with notes specifying lack or reduction of Metro Transit services or hike in bus fare. The second highest impact was higher fees for County services. While few respondents identified what services they were referring to, some mentioned higher car licensing fees. In a parallel set of questions, fewer respondents (18%) said that no one they knew had been impacted by King County budget cuts, while 42% thought that, for someone they knew, social or health services were less available and 38% that public transportation was less available or convenient. Here again, specific concerns about bus route modifications or higher fare were mentioned, but few specifics were noted about social or health services issue. Thus, it is unclear whether respondents were thinking about county services.



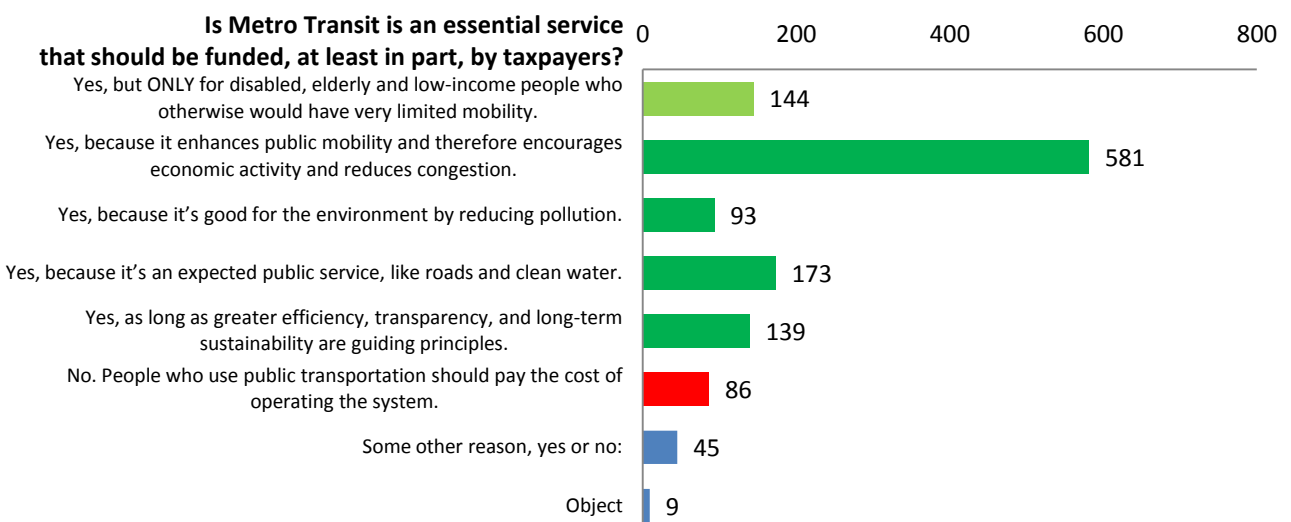
When given a set of choices, a plurality of the respondents (32%) favored “increase efficiency and productivity” as the best way for King County to achieve a sustainable budget and avoid cutting services. If there is a need to cut services, a plurality (30%) indicated that services should be reduced or eliminated on a case-by-case basis, based on priorities set by the County Council and County Executive.

Respondents did not feel that the budget reserve should be adjusted in the short term. Twenty-nine percent supported increasing it later when we are out of the current economic slowdown (in pink below) and 25% were satisfied with the current \$15 million reserve (in green below).



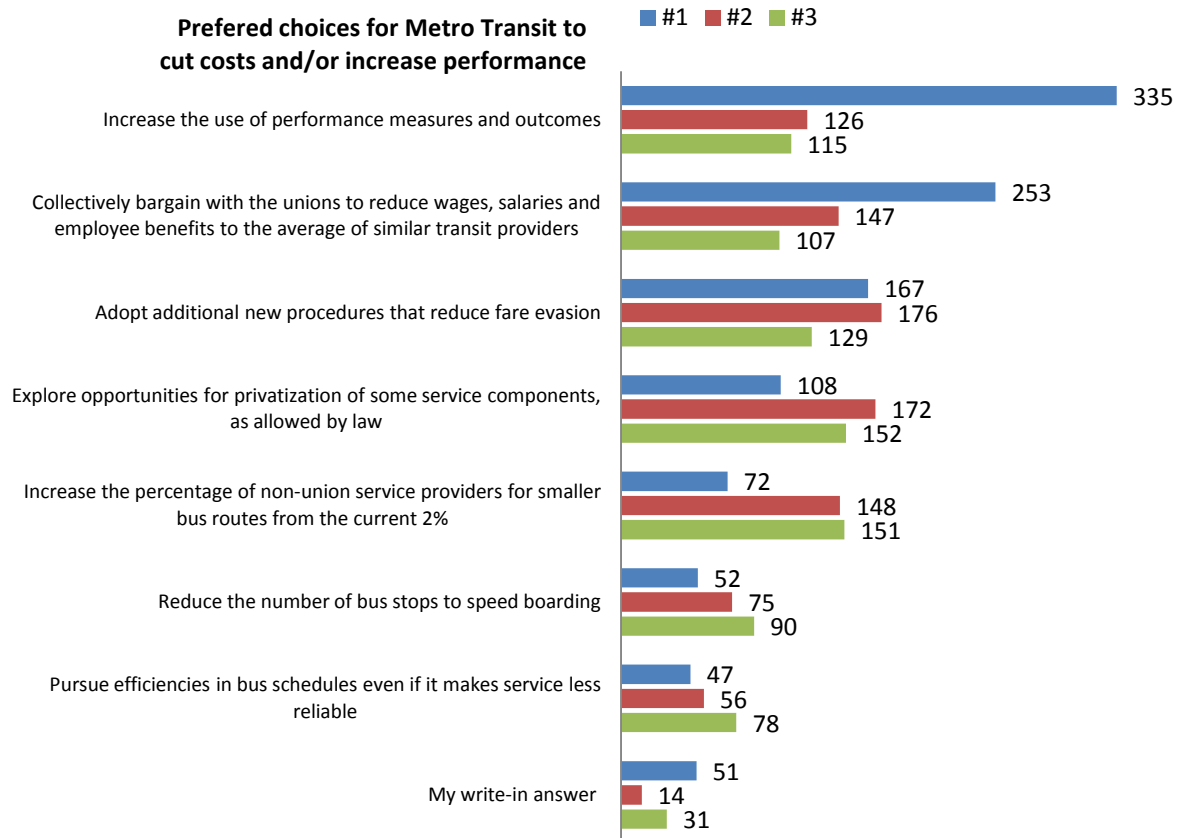
Respondents were divided on what would make King County more efficient and productive. A quarter of them picked each of the proposed recommendations 1) evaluate the cost benefit of outsourcing more functions; 2) enhance the use of new technology and business practices; 3) make wider use of performance audits. The remaining quarter either abstained or proposed a different solution, such as cutting staff or salaries, incentives for staff to perform, or more or no outsourcing.

In a series of questions about the Metro Transit budget, respondents indicated they had taken 14,000 bus trips over the last 30 days, although 62% either took no trip or did not respond. When asked whether Metro Transit was an essential service that should be funded, at least in part, by taxpayers, respondents overwhelmingly said “yes” (in green below), but mostly because it enhances public mobility and therefore encourages economic activity.

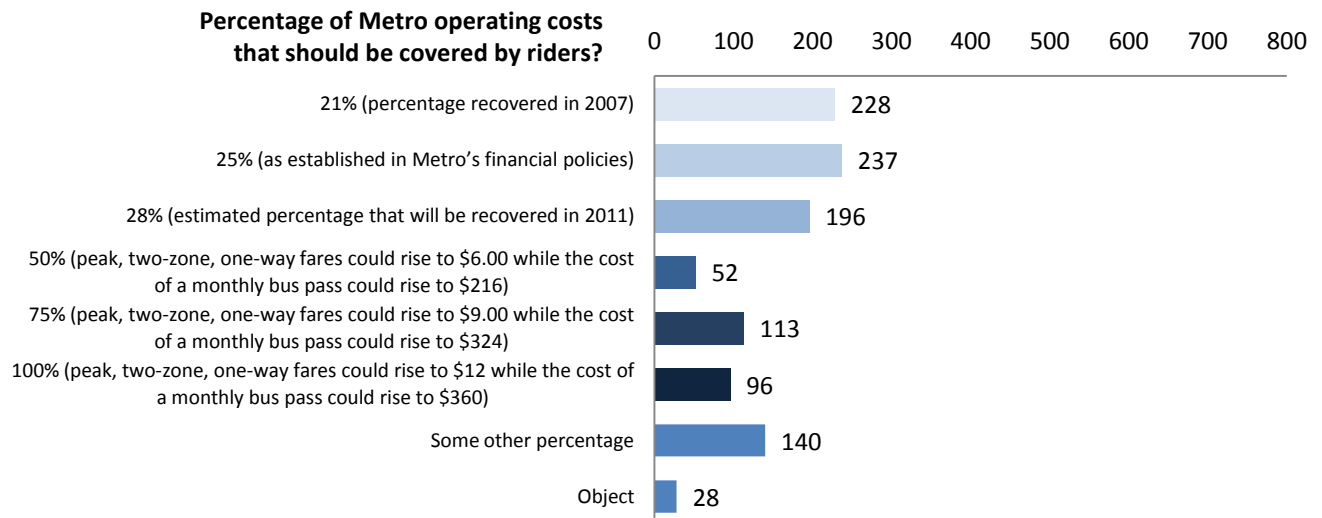


Forty-five percent disagreed and 38% agreed with the recent decision to eliminate the Metro Ride Free Zone in downtown Seattle by October 2012.

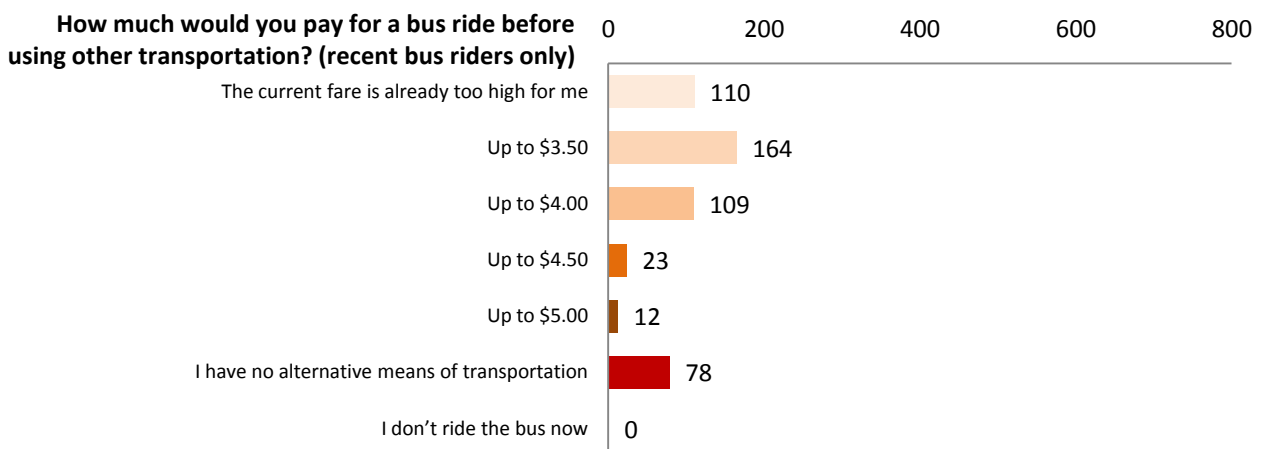
When asked to pick their top three choices among a set list of ideas for Metro Transit to cut costs and/or increase performance, respondents chose as their top three picks, in decreasing order: 1) increase the use of performance measures and outcomes; 2) collectively bargain with the unions to reduce wages, salaries or benefits; and 3) adopt additional new procedures that reduce fare evasion. Numbers of responses to all the options are included in the graph below.



Although 16% opposed any reduction in services, the preferred choice for a quarter of the respondents among a list of possible additional measures to reduce expenses is to convert the lowest productivity fixed-route services to lower cost alternative services, such as vanpools, taxi-scrip or community vans. There was no strong preference on how to help reduce Metro's dependence on the sales tax. Nineteen percent chose to increase bus fares, seventeen percent opposed any new taxes, fees, or other revenue sources to help Metro Transit, and 12% favored increasing the percentage of existing property tax currently going to Metro Transit. A strong plurality (46%) said that a percentage of the operating cost similar to what was or is currently done (21 to 28%) is what should be covered by riders. Nineteen percent thought it should be higher and 10% offered another percentage, often ranging from 0 to 10%. The following graph includes the complete breakdown of answers.



There were divergent views on how much a subset of 511 respondents who currently ride the bus would be willing to pay for a Metro bus ride. While 15% have no alternative means of transportation (in red below), 22% said the current fare is already too high for them.



Raw results from the complete survey are included in the next section, along with the total number of responses for each option and the percentages based on the total number of responses (1,440).

TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES:	1440	100%
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS		
(D-1) What is your Gender?	1399	97%
Male	563	39%
Female	836	58%
(D-2) What is your Age Range?	1406	98%
10-19 years	31	2%
20-29 years	184	13%
30-39 years	217	15%
40-49 years	248	17%
50-59 years	326	23%
60-69 years	239	17%
70-79 years	119	8%
80 years or older	42	3%
(D-3) Over your lifetime, how long have you lived or worked in King County?	1394	97%
Less than 1 year	75	5%
1-5 years	179	12%
6-10 years	175	12%
11-19 years	220	15%
20 years or more	745	52%
(D-4) What is your primary racial or ethnic heritage?	1340	93%
Am. Indian or Alaska Native	73	5%
Asian	40	3%
Black or Afr. American (non-Hispanic)	324	23%
Hispanic or Latino	63	4%
Pacific Islander	25	2%
White (non-Hispanic)	734	51%
Blended Racial Heritage	51	4%
Other	29	2%
(D-5) What is your primary Employment Status?	1363	95%
Self-employed or business owner	180	13%
Work for any for-profit business	232	16%
Work for any nonprofit organization	238	17%
Work for any government	89	6%
Work for any educational institution	53	4%
Student	102	7%
Unemployed and seeking work	133	9%
Homemaker, volunteer, retired, disabled, or otherwise not employed	336	23%
(D-6) What is the highest level of education you have completed?	1355	94%

Grades 1-8	28	2%
Some High School	42	3%
High School Graduate (including GED)	120	8%
Some College or Technical School	216	15%
Technical School Graduate or Two-Year College Graduate	129	9%
Four-Year College Graduate	357	25%
Some Postgraduate Education	151	10%
Postgraduate Degree (Masters, Ph.D., MD, J.D., etc.)	312	22%
(D-7) Where do you live?	1184	82%
Unincorporated King County	66	5%
Algona	1	0%
Auburn	14	1%
Beaux Arts Village	1	0%
Bellevue	61	4%
Black Diamond	2	0%
Bothell	7	0%
Burien	20	1%
Carnation	11	1%
Clyde Hill	2	0%
Des Moines	11	1%
Duvall	3	0%
Enumclaw	1	0%
Federal Way	39	3%
Issaquah	95	7%
Kenmore	9	1%
Kent	28	2%
Kirkland	20	1%
Lake Forest Park	6	0%
Maple Valley	6	0%
Mercer Island	11	1%
Milton	1	0%
Newcastle	6	0%
Normandy Park	1	0%
North Bend	4	0%
Redmond	45	3%
Renton	26	2%
Sammamish	32	2%
SeaTac	5	0%
Seattle	550	38%
Shoreline	27	2%
Skykomish	1	0%
Snoqualmie	7	0%
Tukwila	14	1%
Woodinville	10	1%
I Live Outside of King County	41	3%

(D-8) If you live in King County, who is your King County Councilmember?	1247	87%
Bob Ferguson (district #1)	95	7%
Larry Gossett (district #2)	268	19%
Kathy Lambert (district #3)	169	12%
Larry Phillips (district #4)	252	18%
Julia Patterson (district #5)	65	5%
Jane Hague (district #6)	117	8%
Pete von Reichbauer (district #7)	74	5%
Joe McDermott (district #8)	114	8%
Reagan Dunn (district #9)	77	5%
I work in King County but live elsewhere	16	1%

(D-9) Have you ever testified at a King County public hearing or Town Hall meeting?	1282	89%
Yes	180	13%
No	1102	77%

(D-10) Overall, what level of satisfaction do you have with King County institutions as a whole?	1275	89%
Extremely Satisfied	23	2%
Very Satisfied	132	9%
Satisfied	461	32%
Neutral	388	27%
Unsatisfied	175	12%
Very Satisfied	61	4%
Extremely Unsatisfied	35	2%

TOPIC QUESTIONS

(T-1) Have King County's recent budget cuts impacted you directly? Pick all that apply:

No direct impact from King County's recent budget cuts.	467	32%
Some social or health services are less available	312	22%
Feeling less safe.	262	18%
Public transportation is less available or convenient.	396	28%
Fees are now higher for county services.	340	24%
Other county services have been reduced or eliminated.	191	13%

(T-2) Have King County's recent budget cuts impacted someone you know? Pick all that apply:

No one I know has been impacted directly by King County's recent budget cuts.	261	18%
Some social or health services are less available to someone I know.	606	42%
Someone I know feels less safe.	349	24%
Public transportation is less available or convenient to someone I know.	552	38%
Fees are now higher for county services for someone I know.	398	28%
Other county services have been reduced or eliminated for someone I know.	329	23%

(T-3) What do you think is the best way for King County to achieve a sustainable budget, when expenses are projected to be higher than revenues, to avoid cutting services? (Please select your ONE preferred choice)

	1215	84%
Increase efficiency and productivity.	461	32%
Further reduce labor costs by asking county employees to pay a greater share of healthcare costs.	254	18%
Increase revenues with higher tax rates on sales and property.	101	7%
Obtain new taxing authority from the state to increase revenues with new kinds of taxes.	218	15%
Some other best way to achieve a sustainable budget and avoid cutting services:	161	11%
Object	20	1%

(T-4) What do you think is the best way for King County to achieve a sustainable budget, when expenses are projected to be higher than revenues, if services need to cut or reduced?

	1224	85%
Reduce services across the board (every program is cut by an equal percentage.)	181	13%
Reduce or eliminate services on a case-by-case basis (programs are cut by different percentages based on priorities set by the County Council and the Strategic Plan.)	439	30%
Make social justice a top priority when reducing or eliminating services.	271	19%
Make public safety a top priority when reducing or eliminating services.	238	17%
Some other best way to achieve a sustainable budget if services need to be cut or reduced:	82	6%
Object	13	1%

(T-5) What are your views regarding the permanent Budget Reserve?

	1100	76%
Increase it immediately by obtaining the authority from the state to create a new tax and adding all the new revenue to the permanent General Fund reserve.	115	8%
Increase it immediately by reducing the current level of existing county services and add all of the savings to the permanent General Fund reserve.	85	6%
Increase immediately by asking the voters to raise property taxes and adding all of the new revenue to the permanent General Fund reserve.	51	4%
Increase it later when we are out of the current economic slowdown.	417	29%
I am satisfied with the permanent \$15 million reserve and for additional reserves to fluctuate based on budgeting constraints as set by the county.	360	25%
Some other view regarding the permanent Budget Reserve:	46	3%
Object	26	2%

(T-6) What is your ONE top recommendation for making King County government more efficient and productive?

0%

Evaluate the cost benefit of outsourcing more functions of King County government programs or services to qualified non-profits or for-profit agencies that sign a performance contract when permitted by law.	353	25%
Enhance use of new technology and business best practices (such as Lean) to increase efficiency and reduce the resources needed to deliver specific county services.	380	26%
Make wider use of performance audits to continue to uncover areas and methods where efficiency, productivity or effectiveness can be improved.	330	23%
Some other top recommendation for making King County government more efficient and productive:	69	5%
Object	23	2%

(T-7) Thinking about the last 30 days, how many one-way rides have you personally taken on a Metro bus?

0 trips	898	62%
Total number of trip taken	13417	

(T-8) Regardless of whether you use Metro Transit, do you think Metro Transit is an essential service that should be funded, at least in part, by taxpayers?

	1270	88%
Yes, but ONLY for disabled, elderly and low-income people who otherwise would have very limited mobility.	144	10%
Yes, because it enhances public mobility and therefore encourages economic activity and reduces congestion.	581	40%
Yes, because it's good for the environment by reducing pollution.	93	6%
Yes, because it's an expected public service, like roads and clean water.	173	12%
Yes, as long as greater efficiency, transparency, and long-term sustainability are guiding principles.	139	10%
No. People who use public transportation should pay the cost of operating the system.	86	6%
Some other reason, yes or no:	45	3%
Object	9	1%

(T-9) Do you support the decision to eliminate Metro's "ride free" zone in downtown Seattle as of October 2012?

	1222	85%
Yes	549	38%
No	652	45%
Object	21	1%

(T-10) How would you prioritize the following cost-cutting measures and efficiency strategies for Metro? (Rank your top three choices)

	#1	#2	#3
Increase the use of performance measures and outcomes.	335	126	115
Collectively bargain with the unions representing employees to reduce wages, salaries and employee benefits to the average of similar metropolitan transit providers.	253	147	107
Adopt additional new procedures that reduce fare evasion.	167	176	129

Explore opportunities for privatization of some service components, as allowed by law.	108	172	152
Increase the percentage of non-union service providers for smaller bus routes from the current 2%.	72	148	151
Reduce the number of bus stops to speed boarding.	52	75	90
Pursue efficiencies in bus schedules even if it makes service less reliable.	47	56	78
My write-in answer below.	51	14	31

(T-12) If increasing efficiencies and cost-cutting measures are not enough, what would be the best way to lower Metro's expenses by reducing its current level of service? (Please select your ONE preferred choice.)

	1182	82%
Reduce the lowest productivity services even though these reductions could eliminate all transit service from some communities.	138	10%
Convert the lowest productivity fixed-route services to lower cost alternative services such as vanpools, taxi-scrip or community vans.	351	24%
Reduce peak period routes, preserving allday services to the extent possible.	69	5%
Reduce all-day services, preserving peak service to the extent possible.	90	6%
Consolidate service into fewer routes, increasing walk distances and transferring, but preserving as much of transit system's extent and high frequency service as possible.	143	10%
Reduce transit agency spending on security, instead relying on local law enforcement for security.	102	7%
I oppose any reduction in any Metro services.	234	16%
Some other best way to lower Metro's expenses by reducing its current level of service:	40	3%
Object	15	1%

(T-13) As a means to reduce Metro's dependence on the sales tax and to diversify revenue sources, which of the following revenue sources, if any, do you favor? (Please select your ONE preferred choice.)

	1177	82%
Obtain new taxing authority from the state to create a new county gas tax with all revenues dedicated to Metro.	125	9%
Increase bus fares.	278	19%
Create a new county auto license tab fee equal to 1% of each car's fair market value (for example, \$20 tab fee on a car worth \$2,000, and \$200 on a car worth \$20,000) with all revenues dedicated to Metro.	101	7%
Create a new county property tax levy that is dedicated to Metro.	104	7%
Increase the percentage of existing property taxes currently going to Metro (currently Metro gets about 3% of its revenue from property taxes.)	169	12%
Create new toll roads or other new user fees for people who drive their cars in the county.	93	6%
I oppose any new taxes, fees, or other revenue sources to help Metro.	247	17%
Some other revenue source that I favor:	42	3%
Object	18	1%

(T-14) What percentage of Metro operating costs should be covered by riders?**(Please select your ONE preferred choice.)**

	1090	76%
21% (percentage recovered in 2007)	228	16%
25% (as established in Metro's financial policies)	237	16%
28% (estimated percentage that will be recovered in 2011)	196	14%
50% (peak, two-zone, one-way fares could rise to \$6.00 while the cost of a monthly bus pass could rise to \$216)	52	4%
75% (peak, two-zone, one-way fares could rise to \$9.00 while the cost of a monthly bus pass could rise to \$324)	113	8%
100% (peak, two-zone, one-way fares could rise to \$12 while the cost of a monthly bus pass could rise to \$360)	96	7%
Some other percentage	140	10%
Object	28	2%

(T-15) How much would you be willing to pay for a Metro bus ride before using an alternative means of transportation?

	1152	80%
The current fare is already too high for me	176	12%
Up to \$3.50	285	20%
Up to \$4.00	248	17%
Up to \$4.50	109	8%
Up to \$5.00	29	2%
I have no alternative means of transportation	138	10%
I don't ride the bus now	133	9%
Object	34	2%

PROCESS QUESTIONS**(P-1) Have you participated in any of the previous rounds of Countywide Community Forums?**

	740	51%
Yes	190	13%
No	538	37%
Object	12	1%

(P-2) How did you learn about this Countywide Community Forum survey?

	336	23%
I read an email sent to me by the Countywide Community Forums (CCF)	29	2%
I read an email sent to me by a CCF partner	61	4%
I read a posting (on Facebook) about this survey/forum	11	1%
I read a tweet (on Twitter) about this survey/forum	3	0%
I went to the Community Forums.org website to learn about this survey/forum	16	1%
Someone called me, or word of mouth	205	14%
Object	11	1%

(P-3) How do you rate the information presented in the topic video?

	1125	78%
Excellent	214	15%
Good	723	50%

Fair or average	141	10%
Poor	32	2%
Very poor	6	0%
Object	9	1%

<i>(P-4) Do you think this Opinionnaire® survey was:</i>	993	69%
Very fair and even-handed	281	20%
2 Somewhat fair and even-handed	557	39%
Somewhat biased	113	8%
Very biased	29	2%
Object	13	1%

<i>(P-5) I feel better informed about the issue as a result of participating in this forum</i>	996	69%
Strongly agree	176	12%
Agree	451	31%
Neutral	275	19%
Disagree	64	4%
Strongly disagree	22	2%
Object	8	1%

<i>(P-6) My participation in this forum will have a positive influence on my involvement in other local decision-making actions</i>	1083	75%
Strongly agree	288	20%
Agree	496	34%
Neutral	237	16%
Disagree	39	3%
Strongly disagree	14	1%
Object	9	1%

<i>(P-7) Overall, I believe the Countywide Community Forums are on the right track</i>	1111	77%
Strongly agree	191	13%
Agree	556	39%
Neutral	273	19%
Disagree	58	4%
Strongly disagree	25	2%
Object	8	1%